



# Long Island Field Office

<http://nyfo.fws.gov>

## Endangered Species



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*"To waste, to destroy, our natural resources, to skin and exhaust the land instead of using it so as to increase it's usefulness, will result in undermining in the days of our children the very property which we ought by right to hand down to them amplified and developed."*

**Theodore Roosevelt**



Protecting endangered and threatened species and restoring them to a secure status in the wild is the primary objective of the Endangered Species Program of the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service. The Endangered Species Program works to build and maintain partnerships, promote good science, and adopt an ecosystem approach to management of natural resources. Here on Long Island, USFWS biologists in the Long Island Field Office (LIFO) are involved in recovery efforts the four Federally listed species found on Long Island - threatened

piping plover (*Charadrius melodus*) and seabeach amaranth (*Amaranthus pumilus*), endangered roseate terns (*Sterna dougallii*), and sandplain gerardia (*Agalinus acuta*).

Piping plovers, roseate terns, and seabeach amaranth have declined largely because of the loss and degradation of their habitats from development and/or increased recreational use of the Island's coastal and barrier island beaches. Sandplain gerardia, a small annual related to snapdragons that grows in native grasslands along the coast of the northeastern US has declined because of the loss and degradation of its grassland habitat, caused by increased development, vegetative succession and changing historical regimes. Just as human action contributes to the problem, human action is part of the solution to recover these species' populations.

Recovery efforts include on-site monitoring, participation in plant and animal census surveys, predator management, habitat restoration, oil-spill cleanups, public and private landowner assistance, public education and outreach. We also assist the State of New York with the recovery efforts for State-listed threatened species, such as least tern and American oystercatcher. The Long Island Field office works cooperatively with Federal, State, and local governments, private organizations, and private landowners on recovery actions for these threatened and endangered species.

## ***Working Together: Partnerships for Endangered Species Recovery***

### **Partners:**

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service): Long Island National Wildlife Refuge Complex; Southern New England Coastal Office

National Park Service (NPS): Gateway National Recreation Area & Fire Island National Seashore

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers; U.S. Geological Service (USGS); Federal Aviation Administration (FAA)

New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC)

New York State Department of Parks, Recreation & Historic Preservation; Theodore Roosevelt Nature Center

New York City Department of Parks & Recreation

Suffolk County Department of Parks, Recreation & Conservation; Suffolk County Police Department – Marine Bureau

Nassau County Department of Parks

Town of Islip; Town of East Hampton; Town of Southampton; Town of Brookhaven; Town of Babylon; Town of Hempstead; Village of West Hampton Dunes

Boy Scouts of America

The Nature Conservancy – Long Island Chapter (TNC); Krusos Foundation; North Fork Audubon Society

Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University; Citizens Campaign for the Environment-Citizens Environmental Research Institute

Breezy Point Cooperative; Fire Island Association Cherry Grove Community Association; Fire Island Year Round Residents Association; Fire Island Pines

Keyspan; LIPA

### **Conservation Highlights**

With our partners, we support recovery actions to enhance breeding opportunities and nesting success for piping plovers across the north and south shore of LI from Queens County in the west to Suffolk County in the east. These efforts are beginning to bear success – in 2001, the New York Atlantic Coast piping plover population was 309 pairs and in 2002, 369 pairs nested while fledging 1.62 chicks per pair. The total 2001 U.S. Atlantic breeding pair count of 1280 pairs was the highest since the species' 1986 listing under the U.S. ESA.

Increases occurred in all three U.S. Atlantic recovery units, with the largest percentage gains occurring in New York-New Jersey.



The LIFO has the primary lead for recovery efforts for seabeach amaranth on LI, which supports the largest population of seabeach amaranth within its historical range, extending from South Carolina to Massachusetts. Each year Endangered Species



Biologists from the LIFO assist the New York Natural Heritage Program in conducting annual surveys for this threatened species. In 2002, a total of 190,000 plants were surveyed at twenty-one sites stretching along the south shore of LI from Breezy Point in Queens County to Hampton Beach in Suffolk County. Over 50 percent of the plants occur at a single location – Jones Beach Island East.

We worked with several of our partners to restore roseate tern habitat in Shinnecock Bay at Warners Island. This island was the former site of a roseate tern colony, but has experienced severe erosion over the years which resulted in the abandonment of this site by roseate terns. In addition, we partnered with the Boy Scouts of America and U.S. Geological Service - Biological Resources Division, on the development and construction of roseate tern nesting boxes which will augment the restoration projects and efforts to reestablish roseate tern colonies at some of their historic nesting areas.



Sandplain gerardia is the only plant in NY State that is on the Federal Endangered Species list. Once 60,000 acres of native grassland provided habitat for plants such as sandplain gerardia, and its pink blossoms by the millions colored the prairies in the late summer. Now, all but 200 acres of those grasslands have been lost to development or grown up in brush, and by the 1980s sandplain gerardia had almost disappeared. On LI, significant remnant populations remain only at Sayville, the Hempstead Plains, and Montauk. Sayville supports the largest population of sandplain gerardia on LI, with 85–



95 percent of the total number of plants. Protection of the Sayville grasslands is critical to survival of sandplain gerardia on LI. The Nature Conservancy, with support from the Service, the NYSDEC and the Federal Aviation Administration has been working for more than 15 years to improve sandplain gerardia habitat and increase the numbers of plants that appear each year. Keeping the area in a healthy prairie state is an ongoing process that involves doing prescribed burns by trained

agency prescribed fire crews, cutting shrubs, and mowing. Each fall, mature seeds are collected by hand and resown, sometimes in totally new locations. Total numbers of sandplain gerardia on LI have increased from about 500 in 1990, to 14,000 in 2001, and

more than 80,000 in 2003. This progress is very encouraging but most of these plants occur at just one site in Sayville. This fall, through its innovative Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program, the Service will be doing a prescribed burn on the “Hempstead Plains” site at Nassau Community College to restore habitat for sandplain gerardia and native grassland birds.

### **Technical Assistance and Training**

Because the LIFO biologists have unique expertise pertaining to the management of endangered species, they provide technical assistance to our partners that is invaluable in addressing the challenge of recovering LI’s threatened and endangered species in heavily recreationally used areas. For example:

Two times each year, the LIFO, with several of its partners, hosts a day-long piping plover, tern, and seabeach amaranth steward training class on LI. This training is primarily targeted to volunteers and seasonal plover monitors which are employed by the various local government agencies on Long Island. The class provides participants an opportunity to learn the basics of plover biology and management, as well as how to monitor and protect threatened and endangered species.



This year, the LIFO also conducted an enforcement training session.

The LIFO also organizes an annual seabeach amaranth training workshop. Participants become familiar with this species’ biology and identification, the New York Natural Heritage Program’s survey methodology and reporting requirements, and management practices to help recover this species.

The LIFO actively responds to management issues that involve LI’s threatened and endangered species on a daily basis across the north and south shore of the island. Current examples include working with the NPS and the Fire Island Communities to protect nesting piping plovers and working with the Towns of Easthampton and Southampton, Suffolk County Department of Parks, Recreation & Conservation, and the Breezy Point Cooperative to assist them with their own piping plover nest monitoring and protection efforts.

### **Some Useful Websites:**

<http://nyfo.fws.gov/hot/linew.htm>

<http://pipingplover.fws.gov>

<http://endangered.fws.gov>